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United States Senate

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WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

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October 3, 1983

The Honorable William J. Casey
Director of Central Intelligence
Central Intelligence Agency
Washington, D.C. 20505

Dear Bill:

Last April, our Chairman, Barry Goldwater, introduced a bill that would relieve the Central Intelligence Agency from the burden of searching some of its files in response to Freedom of Information Act requests. While several of us had concerns regarding aspects of this bill, we all agreed with you that it was foolish to require the CIA to search its most sensitive files for documents that would almost never be declassified and released.

Five months of work are now nearing culmination in a bill that we all will be able to support wholeheartedly. You and we have crafted solutions to such difficult problems as the nature of judicial review under this bill, the extent to which the files on activities that have been the subject of investigations will remain open to search and review under FOIA, and how intelligence memoranda or policy memoranda that are circulated outside of designated files but then returned to those files for safekeeping will remain accessible for FOIA search and review. We have also agreed that the CIA will review its designations at least once every ten years to see whether some files--or portions of files--should be removed from designated status.

I think that now is an excellent time to make parallel progress on an issue that our work on S.1324 has highlighted. This is the need to make more declassified materials available to historians. We both know how important history is. I am an avid reader of history and you are a writer of it. We both have been shaped in part by history that we have read over the years. As historians write the definitive works on the post-World War II era, it is terribly important that their studies be based on as full a record as possible, consistent with the need to protect our national security.

The Honorable William J. Casey
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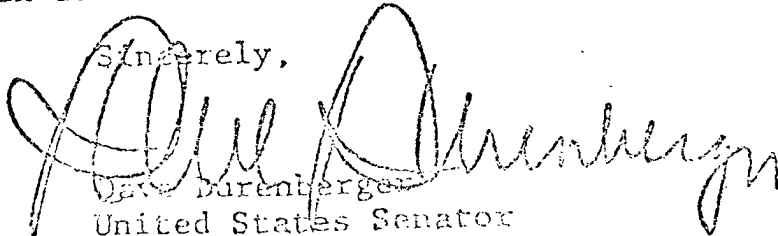
You have recognized this in putting forth a bill that leaves unchanged current FOIA access to intelligence memoranda, policy documents, and files on those covert action operations the existence of which is no longer properly classified. The importance of an accurate historical record is also recognized in your criteria for removing files from designation, which are to include "historical value or other public interest in the subject matter" and "the potential for declassifying a significant part of the information."

I urge you to take the next, vitally important step: to establish procedures for reviewing and declassifying some of the material in your non-designated or de-designated files. Your declassification review program need not review the mass of documents that are either of no interest to historians or still too sensitive to be released. Rather, you could reasonably base your selection of material for review on the same criteria that you have set forth for the review of file designations. The important thing is to make the declassification of useful historical information a cooperative endeavor, rather than a test of wills fought out in FOIA requests and courtrooms.

A declassification review program would be a burden for the CIA, but it would be a manageable burden and one well worth assuming. The CIA would retain control over the size of this effort, and you could avoid the sort of crises and bottlenecks that bedevil areas like FOIA, in which the pace of work may be dictated by the level of outside requests and the vagaries of litigation. You already have a CIA Historian, so it might be reasonable to give him a major role in declassification review. I would be happy to lead the effort to provide you budget support for a dozen positions, say, to be devoted to this enterprise.

Establishment of a declassification review program would be a fitting complement to the fine Intelligence Information Act that I am sure we will pass. It would demonstrate your commitment to openness in the things that matter, while continuing to safeguard that which must remain secret. And it would make a lasting contribution to public understanding of the role of intelligence in a complex and divided world.

Sincerely,



Dan Rostenberg
United States Senator